



ACCESS CURRENTS

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"The new standards will improve access as well as compliance because they are based on a greater understanding of both accessibility and the design process."

David L. Bibb
Acting GSA
Administrator

New Accessibility Standards Adopted for Federal Facilities

The General Services Administration (GSA) has adopted new accessibility standards for federally funded facilities based on updated guidelines the Board issued in 2004. The adopted standards will apply to a wide range of new or altered buildings under the Architectural Barriers Act (ABA), which requires access to facilities designed, built, altered or leased with Federal money. "GSA was eager to adopt the new standards," noted David L. Bibb, Acting GSA Administrator and Vice Chair of the Board, "because they will ensure greater access to all types of Federal buildings while making compliance easier."

The standards apply to the design and construction of new facilities, altered areas of existing facilities, and leased facilities. As indicated in a notice GSA published in the *Federal Register* on November 8, the new standards will apply to construction and alterations that commence after May 8, 2006, and to leases entered into after this date. Compliance with the previous standards, the Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards, will be permitted for construction and alterations that begin before this date and for projects whose design is substantially complete by this date.

As adopted by the GSA, the standards apply to all federally funded facilities, except residential, postal, and military facilities, which are covered by standards maintained by other Federal agencies. Last May, the U.S. Postal Service similarly updated its standards which govern post offices and other postal facilities. The departments of Housing and Urban Development and Defense will follow suit and complete the implementation of new standards under the ABA.

New standards based on the Board's guidelines also must be adopted under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which complements the ABA by ensuring access to facilities in the private and state and local government sectors. ADA standards are maintained by the Department of Justice and, in the case of transit facilities, the Department of Transportation. The Board updated its ABA and ADA guidelines jointly in order to establish a uniform level of accessibility under both laws.

Further information on the status of efforts to issue new standards under the ABA and ADA, including the recent action by GSA and links to its notice, is posted on the Board's website at www.access-board.gov/ada-aba/standards-update.htm.

ABA Facilities	Agency	Status of Update
Federally funded (other than postal, military, or residential)	GSA	New standards replacing UFAS to take effect May 8, 2006
Postal	USPS	New standards took effect October 1, 2005
Military	DOD	[No estimate yet]
Residential	HUD	[No estimate yet]
ADA Facilities	Agency	Status of Update
Public Accommodations	} DOJ	Advance notice issued for comment; next steps include a follow-up notice, another round of comment, and finalization
Commercial		
State/ Local Government		
Transportation	DOT	Final notice pending

2006 Research Agenda

Pedestrian
Signals (including
at roundabouts)

Outdoor
Wayfinding Cues

Effects of Slope
and Surface on
Wheelchair
Maneuvering

Communication in
Transit Facilities
and Vehicles

Indoor
Environmental
Quality

Lighting

Assisted Transfer

Sign Language
Video
Translations

Board Adopts Priorities for Research and Information Gathering

At its November meeting, the Board approved its research agenda for 2006. Every year the Board sponsors or promotes research on various aspects of accessibility. Through its work maintaining accessibility guidelines and standards and its provision of technical assistance, the Board regularly identifies issues or questions that merit further study. A public forum the Board held on its programs and services as a part of a series of ADA anniversary events also identified research priorities.

Several projects focus on issues pertaining to public streets and sidewalks, the subject of new guidelines the Board is developing for public rights-of-way. Some of these efforts will expand existing projects undertaken by other agencies, such as the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). These include an assessment of available technologies for pedestrian signals at traffic roundabouts, which by their design and continuous traffic flow patterns pose challenges to pedestrians with vision impairments, and the development of guidance on selecting accessible pedestrian signal devices based on the type of intersection and site conditions. In addition, funds will be budgeted to advance existing research on the relative effectiveness of various wayfinding cues, including returned curb edges, curb ramp orientation, tactile surfaces, and guide strips, for people with vision impairments in outdoor environments. The Board also plans to commission an analysis of standard human factors protocols for measuring the effects of slope and surface on manual wheelchair maneuvering.

Topics proposed by members of the public at the forum last July are also on the Board's agenda. They include a study of communication access in transportation facilities, including airports and rail stations, and on transit vehicles to gather information for the Board's use in updating its vehicle guidelines. Another project will build upon a major Board-funded study on indoor air quality completed this summer. Conducted by the National Institute of Building Sciences, this study explored ways to improve indoor environmental quality for people with multiple chemical or electro-magnetic sensitivities through specification of building products, materials, ventilation, and maintenance. Attendees of the Board's forum strongly endorsed such a follow-on project.

Other projects will cover areas not previously addressed by the Board's research program, including a review of existing research on lighting. The Board's facility guidelines do not address lighting levels, and the results of this project will help to develop guidance material on the subject. The Board also seeks to convene an expert panel on the topic of assisted transfer of people with disabilities. Specifications in the Board's guidelines for toilet and bathrooms are based on independent access and transfer, and questions have arisen about compliance in some types of medical care and assisted living facilities where bathrooms are designed specifically for aided transfer. In addition to these information collection efforts, the Board will explore a pilot program to provide translations of select Board materials in American Sign Language through web-based videos.

The project priorities will be initiated in 2006 to the extent that funding permits. Where possible, the Board seeks to undertake research in partnership with other organizations or to build upon existing projects in order to maximize available opportunities with limited funds. For further information on these projects or other aspects of the Board's research program, contact Lois Thibault, the Board's research coordinator, at research@access-board.gov (e-mail), (202) 272-0023 (voice), or (202) 272-0082 (TTY). Information on completed Board research is posted on the Board's website at www.access-board.gov/research.htm.

Board Places Draft Right-of-Way Guidelines in Docket

In November, the Board released a draft of guidelines for accessible public rights-of-way to facilitate its work preparing an impact analysis. This analysis must be completed before the Board can officially release the guidelines for public comment. The guidelines cover pedestrian access to sidewalks and streets, including crosswalks, curb ramps, street furnishings, pedestrian signals, parking, and other components of public rights-of-way. In developing guidelines and regulations, Federal agencies often must prepare an assessment of the cost and impacts before a proposed version can be made public for comment.

The Board's aim in this rulemaking is to ensure that access for persons with disabilities is provided wherever a pedestrian way is newly built or altered, and that the same degree of convenience, connection, and safety afforded the public generally is available to pedestrians with disabilities. The draft guidelines are based on recommendations from an advisory committee chartered by the Board. The Public Rights-of-Way Access Advisory Committee included representatives from disability groups, public works departments, transportation and traffic engineering groups, civil engineers, government agencies, and others. The Board prepared draft guidelines based on the committee's recommendations and made them available for public comment in June 2002. Over 1,400 comments were received. The revised draft incorporates many recommendations from these comments.

After it completes its cost analysis, the Board will proceed to publish the guidelines in proposed form and make them available for comment. Further information, including the draft guidelines, are available on the Board's website at www.access-board.gov/news/row-draft.htm. Questions on this rulemaking should be directed to Scott Windley at (202) 272-0025 (voice), (202) 272-0082 (TTY), or windley@access-board.gov.



Courthouse Access Advisory Comm. Meeting

Doubletree Hotel
1515 Rhode Island
Washington, DC
Feb. 9th (9-5)
Feb. 10th (9-3)

Courthouse Advisory Committee to Hold February Meeting in D.C.

The Courthouse Access Advisory Committee will hold its next quarterly meeting February 9th and 10th in Washington, D.C. This committee, which is comprised of designers, disability groups, members of the judiciary, and court administrators, among others, is examining challenges to accessibility in courthouse design in preparing design solutions and best practices. In addition, the committee also is exploring outreach and partnership opportunities for disseminating the information to be developed. The meetings, which are open to the public, will be held at the Doubletree Hotel, 1515 Rhode Island Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. The meetings will start at 9:00 both days and end at 5:00 on the first day and at 3:00 on the second. For more information, contact Dave Yanchulis at yanchulis@access-board.gov, (202) 272-0026 (v), or (202) 272-0082 (TTY).

Elizabeth Stewart, Board Legal Counsel, Returns to Private Practice

Elizabeth Stewart, an attorney with the Access Board for almost 20 years, has resigned her position to return to the practice of family law in her home state of Florida. Stewart was active in a number of Board rulemakings, including those underway on public rights-of-way and passenger vessels, and was instrumental in the organization and operation of the Board's Advisory Committee on Courthouse Accessibility. She also supervised the Board's Compliance and Enforcement Office and served as the Board's Ethics Officer.

Information on Disaster Preparedness and Response

The devastation wrought by hurricane Katrina, like the terrorist attacks of 9/11, has highlighted the importance of accommodating people with disabilities in disaster preparedness and response. A congressional briefing on this issue took place in November. In addition, information from previously scheduled conferences on emergency notification and evacuation is now available.

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On November 10, a congressional briefing was held on the topic of emergency management and response and the needs of people with disabilities. Hosted by the Co-chairs of the Bipartisan Disabilities Caucus, the event featured a panel discussion by representatives from the National Council on Disability, the National Council on Independent Living, the National Organization on Disability, the National Spinal Cord Injury Association, the Paralyzed Veterans of America, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and the American Red Cross. A transcript of the briefing is available on the National Council's website at www.ncd.gov.

The Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Telecommunication Access held a "state-of-the-science" conference on November 2 and 3 at Gallaudet University on ways to improve the accessibility of emergency notification and communication systems. Participants included representatives from the Board, accessibility experts, industry representatives, researchers, and others. Further information on the conference is posted <http://tap.gallaudet.edu/emergencycommconf.htm>.

The Interagency Committee on Disability Research (ICDR) promotes coordination and cooperation among Federal departments and agencies conducting rehabilitation research programs. Last year, the ICDR's Subcommittee on Technology held a workshop on emergency evacuation which provided a forum for discussion on research recommendations to improve available data, building and life safety codes, evacuation technologies, and evacuation practices for people with physical disabilities. The conference proceedings are now available on ICDR's website at www.icdr.us.

Other resources on evacuation planning and disaster preparedness for people with disabilities are posted on the Board's website at www.access-board.gov/evac.htm.

Access Currents is a free newsletter issued by the Access Board every other month by mail and e-mail. Send questions or comments to news@access-board.gov or call (800) 872-2253 ext. 0026 (voice) or (800) 993-2822 (TTY). Mailing address: 1331 F Street, N.W., Suite 1000; Washington, D.C. 20004-1111.

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